

ATT BYGGA ETT SAMHÄLLE VID TIDENS SLUT

Svenska Missionsförbundets mission i Kongo 1881 till 1920-talet

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Abstract

Building a Society at the End of Time: The Mission Covenant Church of Sweden in Congo, 1881 to the 1920s. By Simon Larsson.

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This dissertation is situated in an interdisciplinary academic discourse on missionary work in colonial states. The Mission Covenant Church of Sweden's mission in Congo between 1881 and the 1920s was aimed at converting those considered heathens to the Christian faith, founding local Christian congregations, and-, in particular, changing the structures of the local society. This dissertation examines the missionaries' ideal of a modern future society and the manifestations of these efforts at the missionary stations. The study's empirical sources comprise missionaries' own documents, letters, and published articles and books.

The main theoretical framework is 'governmentality', stemming from Michel Foucault's ideas on discourses, power structures and control over a population's understandings, thoughts, and actions. From this theoretical perspective the state and its institutions cannot alone explain how modern liberal, as well as colonial states, are governed. Changes in interpersonal relationships and individuals' self-image, shaped by collective experiences of organising economic distribution, family, sanctions, leadership, and knowledge create the conditions for effective modern governance. This theoretical framework provides tools for analysing and understanding the missionaries' work with establishing schools, orphanages, nuclear families, and, in particular a protestant work ethic. Governmentality is also used to frame the work of the mission in relation to modern ideals of economy and the state. Furthermore, the governmentality perspective provides a starting point for discussing the missionaries' own Christian self-image and how it relates to modern ideals, and enables an understanding of the mission as techniques for fostering subjects for a modern society.

The empirical analysis suggests that, even if the work of the Mission Covenant Church of Sweden took certain Christian protestant values as its starting point, the ideals of the Congo mission and its projects around education, family and work, were essentially modern. The mission required replacement of pre-colonial political and social organisation and a new political order to establish social institutions which would function alongside the ideal Christian life. The mission depended on, and therefore collaborated with, the colonial state. However, the relation was not without tension as missionaries sometimes found their Christian ideals in dissonance with the brutality of the colonial state in Congo. The dissertation suggests that the mission's ideals of society are central to understand how the mission project was executed. The study also shows that the mission was unable to put its own ideals into practice. The vision had to be implemented in dialogue and negotiation with Congolese Christians. Furthermore, the missionaries had scant and sometimes insufficient resources to carry out the planned social changes. They faced a host of practical problems and difficulties when it came to establishing and running the missionary stations, which consequently put the ideals of a Christian (modern) social organization under severe strain.

Keywords: Christian Mission, Protestantism; Colonialism, Modernity, Governmentality Theory, Subjectivity; Africa; Congo